

BRUCE HAYES

Bet you never knew that Lexington's King of Diamonds could pack a pretty potent one-two punch back in the day, did you?

But Lexington jeweler Bruce Hayes, who grew up in the hardscrabble Erlanger Village mill district, turned out to be a quality amateur boxer in his youth. In an era when high school football was king, Hayes gave up football his senior year to focus on boxing.

His training for the sport he loved was extensive and involved daily doses of weightlifting mixed in with running upwards of five miles per day to keep in shape. He'd often train in his backyard, sparring with other kids in his neighborhood as they developed their boxing skills.

He soon became good enough to travel across North Carolina and Virginia to compete in boxing matches, sometimes against opponents from other textile mills. He won more than 100 amateur fights and soon began competing in Carolina Golden Gloves tournaments.

He was one tough cookie.

Once he retired from the ring, Hayes later became a mentor to Lexington's Jimmy Hester, another prolific Lexington boxer.

In 2011, Hayes was presented with the Floyd Patterson Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2016 he was inducted into the Carolinas Boxing Hall of Fame.

A good all-around athlete, Hayes won the Lexington boys' tennis championship in 1951.

Stock car racing also caught his attention over the years. He might actually be better known for his sponsorship of the modified car driven by Welcome's Ralph Brinkley at Winston-Salem's Bowman Gray Stadium, a combination that produced 64 victories and eight modified championships. In all, Hayes can count on 26 modified titles and more than 150 victories through his sponsorship with various drivers.

